

Ms. Areerat Wijitpatcharaphon from Thailand



Hello. My name is Areerat Wijitpatcharaphon from Thailand. I am spending six months as a visiting researcher at the ADRC to learn about the Japan's disaster management system.

In recent years, many unprecedented natural catastrophes have occurred in regions around the world. Asia has suffered numerous disasters, including earthquakes, tsunamis, wind storms, droughts, floods, and landslides. In other regions of the world, large numbers of people have been killed every year by many different types of disasters. The statistics show that over the last 30 years, Asia has been the most disaster-affected region in the world, accounting for about 90% of those affected by natural disasters, and more than 50% of the total fatalities and economic losses. Furthermore, the statistical trends suggest that the incidence of natural disasters is going to rise in the future. It is therefore vital that the countries of Asia take actions to address this situation and that they launch such actions immediately.

Like the other countries of Asia, Thailand faces threats from natural disasters such as droughts, floods, landslides, cold spells, fires, and wind storms. Geographically, Thailand is located at the middle of a tropical zone called Mainland Southeast Asia. The total land area of Thailand is approximately 513,115 km<sup>2</sup>, and it has a population of 65 million. Thailand shares borders with Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Malaysia. It consists of mountainous regions in the north, a plateau in northeast, an alluvial plain in the center, and virgin forest in the south. Before 2004, Thailand had never experienced any large-scale natural disaster. The gigantic tsunami of 26 December 2004 caused financial losses of more than USD 2 billion and caused overall GDP growth to fall by 0.4%. In spite of the negative impacts of this disaster, it served as reminder that Thailand needs to pay attention to its disaster risks and prepares for unexpected disasters that might occur in the future.

Disaster risk reduction can be achieved through mutual assistance between developed countries and developing countries. Fortunately, Asia has the ADRC, which serves as a key institution for the exchange of knowledge, technology, and information on disaster management.

Before I joined the ADRC, I had been working in Thailand as an official involved in policy and plan analysis of the Research and International Cooperation Bureau, Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM), Ministry of Interior of Thailand. My main responsibility was to coordinate disaster management activities between national and international actors.

During my term at the ADRC (January–June 2009), I will be studying the Japanese flood prevention system. I have chosen to focus on flooding because it is the most devastating type of

disaster in Thailand in terms of economic losses. I personally believe that Japan is one of the most advanced countries in the world in terms of effective flood management. I am also interested in learning about the flood prevention systems that have been adopted in other ADRC member countries. What I learn from my study here should be useful for the future development of flood prevention measures in Thailand.

As the ADRC has been known for its expertise in the field of disaster risk reduction, I am certain that I can learn a great deal while working here as a visiting researcher. At the same time, I am committed to sharing what I have learned from my work at the DDPM with the ADRC so that I can help strengthen and sustain the important work performed by this Asian disaster reduction institution.

\* Country Report of Thailand

<http://www.adrc.asia/countryreport/THA/2008/thailand2008.pdf>